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One Mystery Cleared Up

Remember Francis Gary Powers, the former U.S. Air Force lieutenant whose capture by Russia on May 1, 1960, brought the U2 airplane into the news and blasted a Paris conference into oblivion when Premier Khrushchev refused to have any further dealings with President Eisenhower.

The mystery about Powers was what happened to his plane. The obvious surmise was that it had been shot out of the air by the Russians. A Russian government spokesman said this had been made possible by a "remarkable new rocket" and that Premier Khrushchev himself had given the firing order.

This was pooh-poohed in the United States, which asserted no such rocket existed; that Powers had been flying too high (more than 65,000 feet) to be hit. Moreover, he had been captured alive and the Russians had many identifiable parts of his airplane on display.

The mystery never was cleared up. Its existence was the basis of suspicion that something peculiar accounted for Powers' capture. This was cleared up in the satisfaction of the Central Intelligence Agency last March, when it said its questioning of Powers after his release from prison in Russia established that his plane had been disabled by a rocket that damaged the plane's tail assembly.

The body of Maj. Rudolph Anderson, whose U2 was shot down by Russian "technicians" over Cuba, was returned to the United States last weekend. No longer is there anything to discuss about the way U2 planes can be destroyed. Rockets guided by a system that is sensitive to heat can seek out high-flying jets and cripple them.

The people who said terrible things about Francis Gary Powers for escaping with his life presumably feel better about Maj. Anderson, who wasn't so fortunate.